Understanding Advaita Vedānta through Sāṅkhya and Yoga

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1. The primary text for understanding Sāṅkhya is Sāṅkhya-kārikā by Iśwara Kṛṣṇa. Some of the fundamental concepts of Sāṅkhya resemble closely with Advaita Vedānta. However, certain irreconcilable basic differences make these two incongruous. That is why Bhagvān Ādi Śankarācārya treats Sāṅkhya as the primary opponent (pradhāna malla) in his commentaries and refutes them. Still, since there are several similarities between Sāṅkhya and Advaita, one should carefully peruse the concepts. Further, Sāṅkhya and Yoga have lot of similarities. Sāṅkhya can be said to be the philosophical aspect whereas Yoga is the practical measures to attain the vision of Sāṅkhya. Hence, they are being studied together.

2. Salient features of Sāṅkhya darśana

2.1 Why should one study Sāṅkhya

2.1.1 We all are suffering from three types of miseries namely ādhidaivika, ādhibhautika and ādhyātmika. It is natural for a rational person to enquire as to what would cause certain and permanent annihilation of this misery. However, neither laukika nor vaidika measures can ensure that.

Regarding laukika measures, it is clear that there is no mandatory and complete annihilation of these miseries. One gets a fever and then he takes medicine. However, there is no guarantee that his fever would subside. And even if it subsides, there is no guarantee that it would not recur. This is the example for ādhyātmika dukha. Similarly for other dukha.

Regarding vaidika measures such as yajña etc also, the aikāntika and ātyantika nivṛtti of dukha is not possible because vaidika karmās suffer with the defects of अविशुद्धि, क्षय and अतिशय. There is violence in vaidika karma and hence there is aviśuddhi. The puṇya obtained therefrom is subject to erosion and different karmās have different fruits having gradation. Hence, like laukika remedies, vaidika remedies are not effective in aikāntika and ātyantika nivṛtti is dukha.

The Kārikā enunciates this concept as follows:

दुःखत्रयाभिघाताज् जिज्ञासा तदपघातके हेतौ। दृष्टे साऽपार्था चेन्नैकान्तात्यन्ततोऽभावात्॥ १॥

Because we are struck and wounded by the three kinds of suffering, there arises a natural desire to know (*jigyasa*) if there is a way to destroy this suffering. If one argues

that this inquiry is useless because visible, worldly remedies (like medicine or physical comforts) already exist, then we say that the inquiry is not useless. This is because these worldly remedies do not provide a cure that is certain and permanent.

दृष्टवदानुश्रविकः स ह्यविशुद्धिक्षयातिशययुक्तः। तद्विपरीतः श्रेयान् व्यक्ताव्यक्तज्ञविज्ञानात्॥ २॥

Scriptural or ritualistic remedies (like performing sacrifices or religious rituals) are just like worldly remedies—they fail to cure suffering permanently. This is because rituals are connected with impurity (such as the harm or sacrifice of life), decay (the good karma earned eventually runs out), and inequality (some people can perform bigger rituals than others, leading to jealousy). Therefore, a path opposite to rituals is far superior. That superior path is the true discriminative knowledge (*vijnana*) of three things; vyakta, avyakta and jña.

2.1.2 Sāṅkhya says that neither laukika nor vaidika remedies can result in aikāntika and ātyantika dukha-nivṛtti. And it is only the vijñāna of vyakta, avyakta and jña that can ensure this aikāntika and ātyantika dukha-nivṛtti. This samyak-khyāna (jñāna) is the meaning of the word saṅkhyā from which the word sāṅkhya is formed. These three entities namely vyakta, avyakta and jña taken together are twenty-five in number. Number is one of the meaning of the word saṅkhyā. Thus, Sāṅkhya is also understood as a philosophy which deals with elements being twenty-five in number.

2.2 The twenty-five elements

2.2.1 The two tattvās are prakṛti and puruṣa. Both are independent and eternal. These two have been referred to above by the words avyakta and jña. Prakṛti is pariṇāmī-nitya whereas puruṣa is kūṭastha-nitya.

Prakṛti

2.2.2 Prakṛti is also referred by the words pradhāna or mūla-prakṛti. Prakṛti and its effects are 24 in number. Prakṛti, like puruṣa, does not have any cause. Certain basic features of prakṛti are:

- It is independent and has no cause (otherwise there will be infinite regress).
- It is the cause of the entire manifest world.
- During pralaya, the entire world is present in it in unmanifest form. Hence, it is also called avyakta.
- It cannot be seen by pratykṣa but its anumāna can be done.
- It is inert and non-conscious i.e. jaḍa and acetana.
- It is singular and eternal.

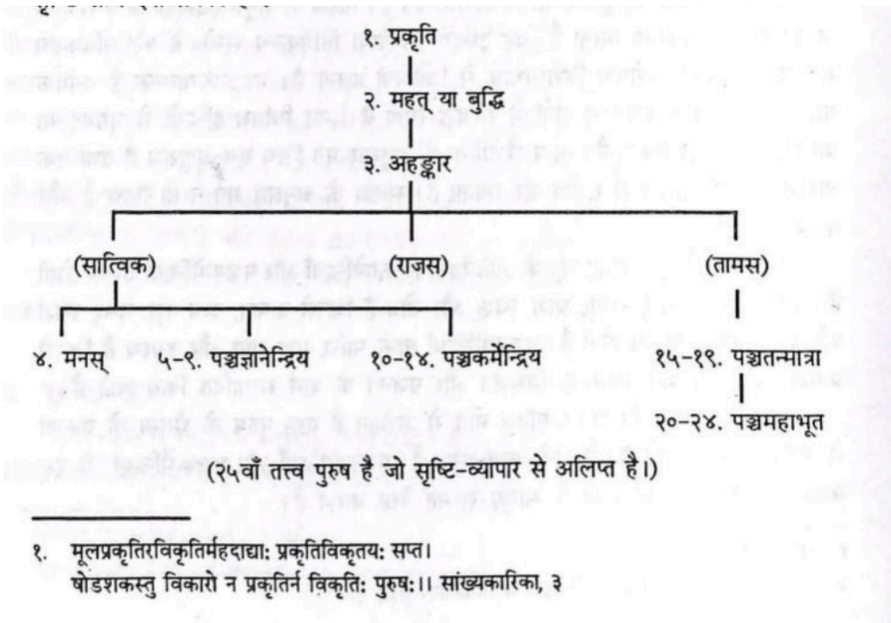
- It is formed of three guṇās namely sattva, rajas and tamas. And hence it is of the form of sukha, dukha and moha (सुख-दुःख-मोहात्मिका). But being inert, it cannot experience the sukha, dukha and moha.
- Prakṛti is constantly active. There is either sarūpa pariṇāma or virūpa pariṇāma that keep on happening. During creation, it is the virūpa pariṇāma that happen whereas during dissolution, the virūpa pariṇāma happens.

2.2.3 The guṇās of prakṛti are unlike the guṇās of Nyāya. It is not that prakṛti is some dravya in which these guṇās are present through samavāya sambandha. Rather, these guṇās are the very swarūpa of prakṛti. Like three strands of the rope, they constitute prakṛti. These guṇās are themselves dravya. They have properties such as प्रकाशत्व, लघुत्व, गुरुत्व etc. The guṇās of Nyāya are nirguṇa. These are called guṇa because they are secondary (gauṇa) as compared to prakṛti.

2.2.4 The guṇās are always together. Hence there can be neither saṃyoga nor vibhāga of these three. However, they can either co-operate with each other or can dominate each other or can help each other. Like oil, wick and flame in a lamp, these three work for the prayojana (meeting the goal) of puruṣa.

2.2.5 Sarūpa-pariṇāma means sajātīya-pariṇāma in which these guṇās don't have conflict with each other and they transform in their own different states. However, in virūpa-pariṇma, there is conflict among these three and there is no equilibrium. During dissolution, it is the sarūpa-pariṇāma that takes place.

2.2.6 The sequence of elements is as under:



2.2.7 From the above chart and kārikā 3, it is clear that:

- Prakṛti i.e. mūla-prakṛti (only cause) is avikṛti (not effect).

- There are seven elements which are both prakṛti (cause) and vikṛti (effect). They are mahat, ahamkāra and five tanmātrā.
- There are sixteen elements which are only vikṛti (effect). They are manas, five jñānendriyās, five karmendriyās and five mahābhootās.
- Puruṣa is neither prakṛti (cause) nor vikṛti (effect).
- Rest of the world like table, chair etc are not vikṛti. They are essentially the same thing. By saying vikṛti, we mean another different element. That is not so in the cause of the world.

2.2.8 From mahat, three types of ahaṅkāra is produced namely sātvika-ahaṅkāra, rājasika-ahaṅkāra and tāmasika-ahaṅkāra. Manas, five jñānendriyās and five karmendriyās are born from sātvika-ahaṅkāra. Nothing is born from rājasika-ahaṅkāra. Five tanmātrās are born from tāmasika-ahaṅkāra. These tanmātrās are śabda, sparśa, rūpa, rasa and gandha. From these tanmātrās are born five mahābhūtās namely ākāśa, vāyu, agni, jala and prithīvī. These mahābhūtās have guṇa which have the same names as those of tanmātrā. However, one should not get confused thereby. One should also note that the concepts of pañcīkaraṇa is not found in Sāṅkhya.

2.2.9 Sāṅkhya follows sat-kārya-vāda. It is different from asat-kārya-vāda i.e. ārambha-vāda of Nyāya. It basically says that kārya is present in kāraṇa before its production. Kārya is 'sat' before its production and hence it is sat-kārya-vāda. Ārambha-vāda, on the other hand, holds that prior to production, kārya is asat. Sāṅkhya holds that production is merely manifestation and it is merely another state of kāraṇa. So, kāraṇa and kārya are two forms of same vastu. Kāraṇa is avyakta form whereas kārya is vyakta form. However, Sāṅkhya holds that this manifestation of kāraṇa as kārya is real and tātvika and is hence a pariṇāma. Vedānta, which also accepts sat-kārya-vāda, holds that this manifestation is unreal and it hence follows vivarta-vāda. Sāṅkhya, Yoga and Rāmānuja hold pariṇāma-vāda. The first two hold prakṛti-pariṇāma-vāda whereas Rāmānuja holds Brahm-pariṇāma-vāda. Advaita Vedānta holds Brahma-vivarta-vāda. Shūnyavāda holds shūnyatā-vivarta-vāda and Vijñāna-vāda holds vijñāna-vivarta-vāda.

Puruṣa

2.2.10 There are innumerable puruṣa. They are all independent, eternal and of the form of consciousness. It is different from prakṛti and its effects. It is viṣayī and can never be viṣaya. It is not conditioned by space and time. It is nirguṇa, swaprakāśa and kūṭastha.

2.2.11 Prakṛti and its effects are inert and hence they don't have any purpose of their own. They serve the purpose of puruṣa. The purpose or prayojana of puruṣa are two-fold namely bhoga or apavarga (mokṣa).

2.2.12 Prakṛti and its effects being constituted of sattva, rajas and tamas are of the form of sukha, dukha and moha. However, they themselves cannot experience that and it is the puruṣa which experiences these.

2.2.13 Puruṣa are many. They must be accepted to be many because otherwise:

- if there is birth/death in case of one puruṣa, there would be birth/death in case of all puruṣa.
- One puruṣa feeling happiness would lead to the experience of happiness of all puruṣa. One puruṣa getting liberated would lead to liberation of all puruṣa.

जन्ममरणकरणानां प्रतिनियमादयुगपत्प्रवृत्तेश्च । पुरुषबहुत्वं सिद्धं त्रैगुण्यविपर्ययाच्चैव ॥ १८ ॥

The plurality of the Puruṣās (conscious selves) is established because:

- Birth, death, and the instruments of life are distinct for each individual.
- Actions or activities do not happen simultaneously across all beings.
- The distribution of the three qualities (*Gunas*) varies from person to person.

2.2.14 Liberated puruṣa have saṅkhyā-gata-bheda but guṇa-gata-abheda. The bound puruṣa have both saṅkhyā-gata-bheda and guṇa-gata-bheda.

2.2.15 One must however keep in mind that these statements are made not for puruṣa swarūpa. For swarūpa of puruṣa, the Kārikā says:

तस्मान्न बध्यते नापि मुच्यते नापि संसरति कश्चित् । संसरति बध्यते मुच्यते च नानाश्रया प्रकृतिः ॥ ६२ ॥

Therefore, in reality, no Puruṣa is ever bound, nor is any Puruṣa ever liberated, nor does any Puruṣa ever transmigrate. It is Prakṛti alone, supported by several puruṣa, that transmigrates, is bound, and is ultimately liberated.

Iśwara

2.2.16 There is no unanimity as to whether Sāṅkhya accepts Iśwara or not. While Yoga certainly accepts Iśwara, there is lack of clarity with respect to Sāṅkhya and different commentators have different opinions.

2.3 The shortcoming of Sāṅkhya in explaining creation

2.3.1 Sāṅkhya explains that creation is for puruṣārtha-siddhi i.e. bhoga and mokṣa. It happens due to virūpa-pariṇāma of guṇās. Question arises as to how sarūpa-pariṇāma of guṇās turn to virūpa-pariṇāma. After all, Prakṛti alone cannot do it. So, there happens a contact with Puruṣa which leads to agitation in guṇās which result in creation.

2.3.2 However, inert Prakṛti and conscious Puruṣa cannot have saṃyoga. Sāṅkhya clarifies that there is no real saṃyoga but by mere presence of Puruṣa, there is agitation in Prakṛti and creation follows. But then, Puruṣa is inactive and is always near to Prakṛti. So, there should always be creation and never the dissolution.

2.3.3 Sāṅkhya clarifies that there is saṃyoga-ābhāsa and there is reflection of Puruṣa in mahat i.e. buddhi and that is the cause of creation. But mahat is already a created tattva and hence it cannot be the cause of creation.

2.3.4 Sāṅkhya says that even in Prakṛti, there is reflection of Puruṣa. But then, there will always be creation because there is always the reflection of Puruṣa.

Thus, it is seen that Sāṅkhya does not satisfactorily explain the process of creation.

2.4 Bondage and liberation

2.4.1 The aikāntika and ātyantika dukha-nivṛtti is called liberation. This is the purpose and end goal. There is no sukha or ānanda in mokṣa because sukha is sattva-guṇa-kārya and puruṣa is beyond that.

2.4.2 Bondage and liberation of puruṣa is stated on account of tādātmya of puruṣa with its reflection in buddhi. This tādātmya is removed when puruṣa gains the following knowledge:

- I am not this prakṛti nor its effects.
- These are not mine.
- I am not even this “I”.

एवं तत्त्वाभ्यासान्नास्मि न मे नाहमित्यपरिशेषम्। अविपर्ययाद्विशुद्धं केवलमुत्पद्यते ज्ञानम्॥ ६४॥

Through the continuous practice of the truth of the principles (*Tattvas*), there arises the ultimate, absolute knowledge: 'I am not (this)' (*Nāsmi*), 'Nothing is mine' (*Na me*), and 'I am not the ego' (Nāham'). This knowledge is complete, free from error, pure, and absolute (*Kevalam*).

This is the swarūpa of puruṣa and this itself is mokṣa. Once one attains it, he is jīvanmukta. Here, due to prārabdha, the life continues but there is no tādātmya with prakṛti and its effects.

तेन निवृत्तप्रसवामर्थवशात् सप्तरूपविनिवृत्ताम् । प्रकृतिं पश्यति पुरुषः प्रेक्षकवदवस्थितः स्वस्थः ॥ ६५ ॥

By virtue of that (pure knowledge), the Puruṣa, remaining undisturbed (*Susthaḥ*) and situated like a spectator (*Prekṣakavat*), beholds Prakṛti—who has now ceased her creative productivity (*Nivṛtta-prasavām*) and has turned back from her seven forms, since her purpose (the experience and liberation of Puruṣa) has been fulfilled (*Artha-vaśāt*).

दृष्टा मयेत्युपेक्षक एको दृष्टाऽहमित्युपरमत्यन्या । सति संयोगेऽपि तयोः प्रयोजनं नास्ति सर्गस्य ॥ ६६ ॥

The one (the Puruṣa) becomes indifferent (*Upekṣakaḥ*), thinking, 'I have seen her (Prakṛti)'. The other (the Prakṛti) ceases her activity (*Uparamati*), thinking, 'I have been seen'. Therefore, even though their physical connection (*Saṃyoga*) may still continue (due to past karma), there remains no further purpose (*Prayojana*) for any new creation (*Sargasya*).

सम्यग्ज्ञानाधिगमाद् धर्मादीनामकारणप्राप्तौ । तिष्ठति संस्कारवशाच्चक्रभ्रमिवद् धृतशरीरः ॥ ६७ ॥

Upon attaining perfect, true knowledge (*Samyag-jñāna*), virtue (*Dharma*) and other forms lose their causal power (to create future births). Yet, the Puruṣa continues to retain the body for some time, purely due to the momentum of past impressions (*Saṃskāras*), just like a potter's wheel keeps spinning even after the potter has stopped turning it.

2.5 Comparison of Sāṅkhya with Advaita Vedāta

S. No.	Sāṅkhya	Advaita Vedānta
1.	It is a dualistic philosophy.	It is non-dual philosophy.
2.	Prakṛti is not equated with ignorance.	Prakṛti is equated with ignorance.
3.	Prakṛti is independent.	Prakṛti is dependent on Brahman.
4.	Puruṣa are many.	Uttama Puruṣa is one. However, depending on prakriyā, jīva are taken as singular or plural.
5.	Puruṣa and Prakṛti have saṁyoga.	Brahman and Prakṛti have ādhyāsika relationship from the frame of reference of ignorance. From the frame of reference of Brahman, there is no Prakṛti.

S. No.	Sāṅkhya	Advaita Vedānta
6.	Prakṛti is eternal.	Prakṛti is non-eternal. It ceases with Brahma-jñāna.
7.	The independence of Prakṛti does not get supported by the examples adduced by Sāṅkhya such as milk-calf, dancer-audience, lame-blind etc.	Prakṛti is accepted as dependent on Brahman.
8.	It treats creation as real.	Creation is mithyā and is explained as either vyāvahārika satya or prātibhāsika satya but never as pāramārthika satya.
9.	It follows sat-kārya-vāda but is prakṛti-pariṇāma-vāda.	It follows sat-kārya-vāda but is Brahman-vivarta-vāda.
10.	Mokṣa is ātyantika-dukha-nivṛtti but not ānanda-rūpa.	Mokṣa is niratiśaya-ānanda.
11.	The sequence of creation is similar to Advaita Vedānta.	The sequence of creation is similar to Sāṅkhya but Pañcikaraṇa is unique to Advaita Vedānta.
12.	It holds Prakṛti-Puruṣa-bheda-jñana as the samyak-jñāna.	It holds Brahma-ātmā-aikya-jñāna as the ultimate jñāna.

3. Salient features of Yoga Darśana

We have seen that the philosophical basis of Yoga is same as Sāṅkhya and it is mainly concerned with the theorization of practical aspects and methods of attaining the goal as enshrined in Sāṅkhya darśana. We shall be concentrating on Yoga as explained in Pātañjala-Yoga-Sūtra.

3.1 Salient features of Yoga

3.1.1 Yoga is defined as citta-vṛtti-nirodha. While in a general sense, it consists of eight limbs known as aṣṭāṅga-yoga, in its technical connotation, it is defined as citta-vṛtti-nirodha. By the word citta, all three elements namely buddhi, ahṅkāra and manas are meant. The vṛtti of citta are five in number namely pramāṇa, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidrā and smṛti. Pramāṇa is satya-jñāna such as knowing rope as rope. Viparyaya is mithyā-jñāna such as snake-jñāna in rope. Vikalpa is defined as jñāna which is born of shabda but is devoid of the object denoted by it such as horns-of-hare. Nidrā and smṛti are self-explanatory. They both are transformations of citta. There are five states of citta, namely kṣipta, mūḍha, vikṣipta, ekāgra and niruddha. By the word yoga, those citta-vṛtti-nirodha which happen in ekāgra and niruddha chitta is meant.

The citta-vṛtti-nirodha i.e. samādhi which happens in ekāgra-citta-bhūmi is referred to as samprajñāta-samādhi whereas the samādhi happening in niruddha-citta is referred to as asamprajñāta-samādhi.

3.1.2 Samprajñāta-samādhi reveals the true nature of the object of samādhi, weakens the kleśa (avidyā, asmitā, rāga, dveṣa, abhiniveśa), makes karma-bandhana unable to bear fruit and orients the citta towards nirodha. When all vṛtti are niruddha, then it is called asamprajñāta-samādhi.

3.1.3 The eight limbs of yoga are divided in two parts. The first five, namely yama, niyama, āsana, prāṇāyāma and pratyahāra are bahiraṅga-sādhana (indirect means) of samprajñāta-saādhi whereas dhāraṇā, dhyāna and samādhi are antaraṅga-sādhana (direct means) of samprajṇāta-samādhi. However, for asamprajñāta-samādhi, even these three are bahiraṅga-sādhana. The antaraṅga-sādhana for asamprajñāta-samādhi is para-vairāgya. The collection of dhāraṇā-dhyāna-samādhi is called saṃyama.

3.1.4 Dhāraṇā refers to fixing of citta through its vṛtti-alone to either external or internal viṣaya. Basically, one needs to concentrate on some object. When in that object, there is homogeneity and continuity of knowledge, then it is called dhyāna. So, if the object is x and if there is sequential x-jñāna alone, like taila-dhārā-vat, then it is called dhyāna. And when dhyāna becomes as if devoid of its own jñānātmaka-swarūpa and there is illumination of only the object of concentration, then it is called samādhi.

3.1.5 Samprajñāta-samādhi is called sabīja-samādhi and asamprajñāta-samādhi is called nirbīja-samādhi. Through samprajñāta-samādhi on reflection of puruṣa in citta, one gets viveka-khyāti. This is nothing but the samyak-jñāna of Sāṅkhya. By this viveka-khyāti, there is clear understanding that Puruṣa is different from Prakṛti. And therefore para-vairāgya arises and one renounces even this viveka-khyāti. Through this para-vairāgya, all citta-vṛtti cease and one situates in asamprajñata-samādhi. With long practise of asamprajñāta-samādhi, the citta merges back in Prakṛti and there is kaivalya of Puruṣa.

3.1.6 Iśwara is a specific Puruṣa who is devoid of kleśa, karma, vipāka (karma-fala) and āśaya (karma-saṃskāra). He is eternally liberated. Asamprajñāta-samādhi can be attained by Iśwara-praṇidhāna also. It means fixing the citta in Iśwara with bhakti.

3.2 Comparison of Yoga and Advaita Vedānta

S. No.	Yoga	Advaita Vedānta
1.	It follows Sāṅkhya and hence all defects thereof continue here.	No such defects are present.
2.	It postulates samādhi as the reason for mokṣa.	It postulates Brahma-ātmā-aikya-jñāna as the remover of ajñāna which shows one's already present liberation.
3.	Since citta and Puruṣa are real entities, the kaivalya of Puruṣa can happen only when there is non-appearance of citta. Hence, asamprajñāta-samādhi is essential.	Since citta is illusory, the Brahma-ātmā-aikya-jñāna is enough for liberation.
4.	There is no concept of nididhyāsana.	Nididhyāsana is needed to remove the viparīta-bhāvanā. Here, Brahmākāra-pratyaya-pravāha in which tripuṭī is present, is called nididhyāsana. Samādhi is explained.